

Wild Card by maddierose

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Summary:

Remy Saunders doesn't know what she wants, other than to escape the boredom of living in Hawkins. Reckless and selfish, she indulges in drinking, smoking and bad decisions to try and feel the thrill her small-town life is lacking. But there are some seriously weird things happening in Hawkins. Soon, Remy finds herself dealing with horrors both human and supernatural. Steve/OC.

1. how to be a heartbreaker

Warnings: none

This is how to be a heartbreaker

Boys they like a little danger

We'll get him falling for a stranger

If there was one thing that Hawkins took seriously, it was the impending arrival of Halloween. Merrill and Eugene had already started their latest argument over pumpkins, or at least that was the last thing Remy Saunders had heard before she'd said goodbye to her dad and left Hawkins Police Station to get to school.

Remy leaned against the side of Tina's car, smoking a cigarette and milling around the front of Hawkins High School. It felt weird to be a junior. Only this year and next year left, then she'd be out of high school altogether. What did she want to do with her life? Her parents were constantly asking, and Remy was no closer to having an answer for them.

A blue Camaro screeched into the school parking lot, making Remy roll her eyes. Why did guys drive like such assholes? Half of the time they parked crooked, and she hated having to listen to people slamming on their horns because someone had almost hit another person's car. The guy who got out had longish dirty blonde hair and wore double denim. At a glance, Remy had to admit that he was attractive.

"Who is that?" Vicki asked, her tone mirroring exactly what Remy was thinking

"I have no idea," Tina admitted, her tone becoming playful, "But would you check out that ass? Just look at it go."

He is definitely going to be her conquest at the Halloween bash , Remy thought. She couldn't wait for Tina's Halloween bash, in truth. Any excuse to get black-out drunk was totally fine by her. Besides, it wasn't like she could really have the party at her place. It'd be a firm 'no' from both of her parents - not that they were really home much in any case.

She'd just crash in Tina's spare bedroom like she had a million times before. Thank god Tina's parents were way cooler than hers. Tina hadn't officially started handing out the pumpkin-orange invites yet, but she'd been talking about the party for at least a week.

"What do you think of him, Remy?" Vicki, Tina and Carol all looked to her for approval. She was, after all, the queen bee of their year group.

"I don't know." Remy shrugged her shoulders nonchalantly, blowing out a ring of smoke. Carol had been trying to get Remy to teach her how to do it since the start of their sophomore year, but it was kind of just Remy's thing.

"Do you think he's hot?" Tina persisted.

"I guess." Remy knew that her disinterested responses weren't what the other girls wanted to hear, but she didn't care. She had made her disinterest in their basic fawning over boys evident from the beginning.

It was a cruel and vicious cycle. Remy indicated her lack of interest in a boy, another of the girls would pursue him, and Remy would end up fucking him. She'd always shrug it off as she had her disinterest in the beginning - she couldn't help that the guys liked her, that they wanted her more than they wanted her friends. Carol was steady with Tommy, but Tina and Vicki got disheartened. It was Remy reminding them of her place. She was the alpha, and she could get away with whatever she liked.

Remy noticed as Nancy Wheeler and Steve Harrington walked over to the school from the parking lot, holding hands. It was still weird to think she, Nancy and Barb Holland had all been best friends throughout middle school. It had only been in their freshman year

that they'd started to drift apart. Nancy and Barb had remained close, but Remy...she'd started hanging around with the popular clique. Drinking, doing drugs, generally doing things that had earned her the derisive label of 'white trash' from Barb, which had seen any distance become the end of a friendship.

Barb had disappeared last year, not long after Steve and Nancy had started dating. Remy had no idea what had happened to her. It seemed no one did. People had stopped asking, and Remy's dad had said the case probably wouldn't ever be solved and not to keep digging about it.

Remy tossed her cigarette to the ground and stomped it out under her bright blue sneaker. She had English first, which was tolerable. She could stand the teacher rambling on about whichever Shakespearean play they'd be studying this term. Reaching into her bag, she withdrew her water bottle and juggled it with a smug smile.

"I got us a little something to get us through first period."

"Is that vodka?" Vicki gasped, while Tina gaped.

Remy smiled, enjoying being scandalous. Someone had to be, in a town as boring as Hawkins. It wasn't a true term unless Remy had been suspended at least once, and she'd made a point to have her suspension for a different reason each time. Her dad had grounded her for three months when it had been for having sex in the boys' locker room.

"Of course it is. Just a sip, I don't need any of you throwing up or anything gross." She took the first sip, then passed the bottle around. Vicki coughed and spluttered, but Tina at least took it like a champ. Once the bottle was returned to her, Remy screwed the lid on tightly and offered them her most charming grin.

"Alright, ladies. Time for class."

Biology so wasn't Remy's thing, so she decided to cut class and head into town last. Usually she ducked through the gymnasium to head out, but today the senior boys seemed to have basketball. Undeterred,

Remy headed around them to the exit, their sneakers squeaking across the gymnasium ball as they fought for dominance over a stupid ball. A ball which smacked Remy right in the head.

Stumbling, Remy almost tumbled onto the bleachers. Picking the ball up, she spun around with a fierce glower already on her face, ready to lay into whoever had been careless enough to almost kill her with a basketball.

“Sorry.” It was the new guy who jogged over - the one that Tina and Vicki had been obsessing over since the start of the day. There was an apologetic smile on his face. “Didn’t mean to get you.”

“Well, you did.” Remy folded her arms over her chest. “So I think I’m owed more of an apology than some half-assed ‘sorry’.”

“Really sorry then.” The boy took the ball from her. She noticed that his eyes raked over her figure. “Billy Hargrove, by the way.”

Remy’s smile was as sweet as it was fake. “Don’t care.”

“You’re one of Tina’s friends, right?” Billy raised his eyebrows. “The girl having the Halloween party?”

“You could say that.” Remy shrugged her back securely on her shoulders. “Tina’s parties are always pretty epic.”

“Guess I might have to go then.” Billy grinned, glancing back at the other boys and tossing the ball in their direction when they started calling his name. “Will you let me know your name if I bring you some drinks at the party?”

Remy was pleased, but she concealed it with arched eyebrows, tossing her dark blonde hair back over her shoulder.

“Maybe.”

Billy laughed. “You’re a tough nut to crack.”

Then he sprinted back off toward the basketball game. It didn’t escape Remy’s notice that Steve was staring in her direction, expression unreadable. They’d been friends once too - he’d hung

around with their group before he'd started dating Nancy. She was such a nerd now. Remy wondered if she'd even had sex with Steve, or if she was waiting for marriage or something corny like that.

Her head throbbing, Remy headed out of the gymnasium. She was certain now that Tina wouldn't be hooking up with Billy at her party at all, because he'd be too busy trying to catch Remy's attention. Remy knew that she was pretty - she was on the tall side, slim with an hourglass figure, and big baby blue eyes. The boys knew Remy was pretty, too. She liked it that way.

Yet Billy's interest was somewhat dampened by that guarded look Steve had shot her. He'd be at the party - pretty much everyone in junior and senior year would have been invited, knowing Tina. That was, if Nancy didn't have some boring study night or something planned. They'd barely spoken a handful of words over the past few months, so why did he pay her any attention at all? He wasn't her friend, wasn't Nancy's friend.

Remy focused on Tina's party. She was renowned for being the centre of attention, the life of the party. Remy would indulge in any drink, and sometimes the occasional drug. She had to make an impression on this Billy guy if nothing else. She knew whatever her costume was, it had to be killer.

"How was school, honey?" Penelope Saunders was in the kitchen putting a potato bake in the oven when Remy crunched the keys in the lock and stepped inside. She seemed to love playing the classic housewife when she got home from work. She frowned when she saw the lit cigarette in Remy's hand. "Remy, I've told you, no smoking inside the house."

Remy rolled her eyes and tapped out into the ashtray on the kitchen bench. Her dad smoked like a chimney at the dinner table, but she wasn't about to get into that argument. He was home from work already, early for Kieran Saunders, reading a newspaper on the couch. He shot his daughter a disapproving look over the top of it.

"I hope you haven't managed to get yourself into trouble already."

Remy beamed. "Of course not, Daddy."

"Don't try that with me. That incident in the boys' locker rooms was completely unacceptable behaviour, do you know how embarrassing that was for me?"

Remy was extremely aware. In fact, the only time her parents paid her any attention was when she acted out. Sometimes, that was why she did it. Her dad barely spoke to her in the rare hours when he was actually home, and her mum was always out getting something done to her hair or nails or getting coffee with a friend. Remy was home by herself most of the time, so having both parents home tonight was truly some kind of celebration-worthy occurrence.

"I'm at Tina's for Halloween." Remy dumped her bag on the dining room table. "I'll probably stay the night."

"When was this discussed?" Kieran put down his newspaper. He had frown lines on his forehead that seemed permanently etched there. Paired with his receding hairline, Remy often thought he looked older than his forty-two years.

"Um, it's being discussed now."

"None of the attitude, young lady." Kieran pushed himself up from the couch. "What exactly does this Halloween event entail?"

"It's just a few friends, maybe a punch." Remy shrugged her shoulders. Lying about these events came easily to her now. That was why she stayed at Tina's - to avoid her parents suspecting too much of the truth.

"It's just a night out, Kieran," Penelope said calmly, "Besides, we won't be home that night in any case, perhaps it's best that Remy has company."

"Wait, you won't?" It wasn't surprising, just disappointing.

"We have a legal conference for your mother's work." Kieran was back on the couch, the newspaper in front of his face again. "We will be out of town for a few days. I've already notified the station."

“Great, so you can have Jim keep an eye on me?” Remy couldn’t help the sarcasm dripping from her voice. Kieran and Jim Hopper, the chief of police, had been high school buddies. Whenever Kieran and Penelope went away, Jim would call in and check on Remy. She was seventeen years old and didn’t need a babysitter, especially not a cop, but like her parents would listen to that.

“Again with the attitude.” Kieran sighed.

“He’s just making sure you’re alright, sweetheart,” Penelope assured her. Her mum did this thing where she opened her mouth and soothing words came out, like their softness could mask the hurt of constantly abandoning her only daughter.

“Look, I’m going to my room.” Remy picked up her bag again and headed upstairs, taking care to slam and lock her bedroom door. She flopped down on the down and heaved a sigh. At least with her parents out of town, it wouldn’t matter if she did go on a massive bender for Halloween. They wouldn’t know. They probably wouldn’t care. She’d answered the door to Jim high several times before, she could do it again.

“It’s a cute costume,” Tina commented, sitting on her bed and watching admiringly as Remy did a twirl in front of the mirror. Not that Remy needed Tina’s validation - she already knew that she looked hot. A smug red-lipped smile crossed her face. There was a lot of skin on display, but what else would one expect from a Playboy bunny costume? Remy was looking to get laid, and she would be extremely surprised if this costume didn’t deliver the desired result.

“You’ve still got plenty of time to make that awesome punch,” Vicki piped up.

It was true that Remy made the best alcoholic punch, so good that you couldn’t even taste the alcohol in it. Right now, she was too busy taking in how great she looked. Her stiletto heels made her legs look even longer, and the bodysuit definitely emphasised how small her waist was. She glanced over her shoulder at Tina.

“How many people are we expecting tonight?”

“Not sure.” Tina shrugged. “Whoever shows up, really.”

“I’ve still got the guest room,” Remy stated. It was common knowledge that was her place at Tina’s, but she needed to assert herself anyway, in case anyone got ideas about hooking up in there.

“I’ll share with you,” Vicki said eagerly.

“Maybe,” Remy responded with a knowing smirk. Vicki looked a bit crestfallen at the reply, but composed herself and began filing her nails. If Remy was going to bring a boy to bed, there was no way she’d be sharing with Vicki.

“So, what do you think my chances with Billy are?” Tina shuffled across on the bed so that Remy could sit down.

“We don’t really know much about him.” Remy played with Tina’s hair, working it into a loose braid. She knew how much her friends enjoyed any sort of attention or affection from her. “We don’t know what he likes in a girl, you know?”

“That’s so true,” Tina admitted, as if she hadn’t even thought about that. “I guess all I can do is give it my best shot, pay extra attention to him, you know?”

As the party’s hostess, Remy sincerely doubted that Tina would have the time to dedicate to Billy, but she wisely remained silent on that issue. Instead she focused on finishing Tina’s braid, picking up a hairband from the bedside table.

“Your hair looks so good like this.”

“Do you think I should wear it like this tonight?” Tina asked, tilting her head to the side.

Remy shrugged. “Up to you. Whatever you think Billy would like more.”

Personally, she didn’t think it would matter how Tina wore her hair in the end, but she wasn’t exactly about to tell her that. Remy never made it obvious who she would go for and when. She just made her move whenever she wanted to, regardless of the consequences.

This time, however, she didn't know just what those consequences would be.

2. bubblegum bitch

Warnings: implied sex

Hit me with your sweet love, steal me with a kiss

I'm Miss Sugar Pink, liquor, liquor lips

I'm gonna be your bubblegum bitch

The party was a raging success, of course. No one would have expected anything less. Dressed in her killer costume, Remy cheerfully refilled the punch bowl throughout the night. Billy was still smoking outside with some of the senior boys, but she had no doubt that he would come inside eventually. He'd come dressed as Danny Zuko from Grease and judging by the cheers from everyone, he was attempting the keg king challenge.

Once upon a time, that had been Steve's title. Remy reminisced on a time when Steve had hung out with their circle, when he'd cared more about more than just Nancy and studying. God, was he not aware that you could let loose and also get good grades? Remy had been a B-average student for the past year despite her antics, after all.

Everyone was chanting Billy's name as he sauntered inside with beer dripping down his bare chest. Tommy followed close behind. It didn't escape Remy's notice that Tommy was clinging desperately to Billy's popularity.

"We got ourselves a new keg king, Harrington." Tommy's voice was mocking as he strode over to Steve and Nancy. Remy doubted that he would be so confident without Billy and the others there to back him up.

"Yeah, eat it, Harrington," another of the boys crowed.

Steve just removed his sunglasses and stared directly at Billy, unintimidated. Nancy headed for the kitchen immediately. She was always one to run away from danger, whereas Remy hurtled headlong toward it. Heaving a dramatic sigh, she clicked over to the

boys and placed herself between them before things could get ugly. Parties were wild, but punch-ups in Tina's living room were another thing entirely.

"Let it go, Steve."

"Whatever, Remy." Steve tore his gaze away from Billy, barely acknowledging her before heading off in search of his buzzkill girlfriend. Having successfully turned down the tension, Remy turned to Billy, the new keg king. The other boys were still congratulating him, but his eyes were on her as he took a drag from his cigarette, blowing out smoke.

"Do I get a name now?"

She tossed her hair back. "Remy Saunders."

"Ah, the infamous Remy." He smirked. "I've heard some stories about you."

She arched her eyebrows. "Good or bad?"

"Mostly bad." His tone didn't sound like he was too perturbed.

She nodded. "Sounds about right."

"Nice costume," Billy's eyes raked over Remy's figure, before resting on her cleavage. "Well, if you can call that tiny thing a costume."

Remy tilted her head to the side. "And a leather jacket and bare chest make a costume?"

"I'm Danny Zuko from Grease," Billy stated, as if she had somehow missed that part. She folded her arms over her chest, fully aware that it only accentuated her cleavage further. She also noticed Tina and Vicki across the living room, whispering together and staring over at her and Billy.

"Yes, I know who you're dressed as." Remy watched as Billy put out his cigarette in one of the ashtrays Tina had scattered around the place. "I've got more cigarettes upstairs if you want another smoke. I'm staying in Tina's spare room for the night."

Billy cast around the party. Tina offered him a dazzling smile, but he ignored it in favour of Remy. They always did. Her smile faded, and Remy rubbed salt into the wound by waving across to them. As crestfallen as Tina was, she'd be stupid to follow and cause a scene about it.

"Sure."

They headed for the stairs, Remy determinedly weaving her way through party-goers as she did so. In the heels she was in, there had been a time when alcohol would have had her stumbling about like a baby giraffe. These days, Remy knew how to walk a straight line in six-inch heels after three shots in a row.

"Remy." Steve appeared out of nowhere and grabbed her arm, eyes blown wide with concern. "You seen Nancy?"

"Jesus, Steve, I don't know." Remy tugged out of his grip, irritated by the interruption. She wasn't Nancy's babysitter, for God's sake. "Check the bathroom, she's probably puking her guts up."

Hurt flashed across Steve's face at her snappy response, but she was too preoccupied to care. She headed upstairs without sparing him another thought. What did she care if he was having problems with his girlfriend? Nancy had seem unimpressed from the moment she rocked up. Probably too much alcohol and drugs for the princess to handle.

Tina's spare room was modestly furnished, with a double bed and a few sparsely-filled bookcases to make it look less bare. Sometimes Remy came and stayed over after she'd had an argument with her parents, but mostly it was just her spot to crash after a party. Sometimes alone, sometimes not.

"Did you really invite me up here for a cigarette?" Billy sounded amused as Remy clicked the door shut behind them, drowning out the music and laughter from downstairs. She locked the door just in case, although she doubted anyone was going to be coming inside.

"No," Remy admitted, "I had something else in mind."

“Like what?” Billy wet his lips with his tongue, smirking. She tilted her head to the side, thinking that he knew exactly ‘what’.

“How about you try guessing?”

Billy hooked his arms around her waist, pulled her close and kissed her. He tasted like beer and cigarettes. It wasn’t a nice taste, but one that Remy was accustomed to. She felt a surge of victory and smiled against his lips as she put her arms around his neck. She knew she’d had Billy hooked, and this party and his eagerness just proved it. Remy drew back and reached down to pry off her heels.

“Did I guess right?” Billy’s voice was husky.

“Mmhhh.” Remy couldn’t manage more of a sophisticated response as Billy’s lips trailed down her neck. His fingers crept up from her waist to unzip the back of her costume, and she had the distinct impression that they were definitely on the same page.

Remy slipped Billy’s leather jacket off his shoulders, examining him openly. She could tell that he definitely worked out. Remy trailed her fingers down his chest, but Billy caught her wrist, backing her against the bed. With his free hand, he tugged at her costume, slipping it off entirely. She grinned at the way his eyes lit up with lust, the hunger in his expression.

“See something you like?”

“I can see a lot I like.” Pressing her back against the bed, Billy climbed on top of her, kissing across her collarbone. Remy couldn’t help but grin as his lips drifted lower still. She’d won. She’d gotten exactly what she wanted.

The party continued to rage downstairs, but Billy and Remy had something completely different on their minds.

Remy woke up to soft snoring beside her. It took her a moment to remember where she was, and who she was with. Billy lay beside her with his mouth open wide, fast asleep. Remy flopped back against her pillow, a smile spreading across her lips as she remembered the

events of the night before. She and Billy hadn't ended up going back downstairs at all. She was surprised that they hadn't broken the wooden bedframe with the vigorous sex they'd engaged in, although no one would have heard it creaking above the pulse of the music.

Checking the time, Remy realised that she should probably get home before Tina asked her to help clean up the messy state the house was no doubt in. Slipping out of bed, Remy removed her clothes from her duffel bag and started to get dressed. She'd packed a spare shirt and shorts as well as her pyjamas. She had a bottle of water as well - Remy was a pro at avoiding hangovers now, unless she'd had more to drink than she'd intended. Fortunately, this morning wasn't one of those mornings.

"Looks just as good as the bunny costume." Billy's voice startled her, prompting her to spin around. She hadn't realised he'd woken up. He was watching her with a lazy smile, completely at ease in the bed.

"Uh huh." Remy planted her hands on her hips, tilting her head to the side and examining him. "Are you just staying in bed all day, or do you want to get some breakfast and then take me home?"

She knew it was a brazen question. He could just brush her off, tell her it had been something that happened in the heat of the moment. But Remy was good at reading people, and she had the feeling that wasn't going to happen. Billy seemed interested - perhaps it was just in terms of an attraction, but it was an interest nonetheless.

"I bet you know all the cafes and diners in town." Billy crawled out of bed, and Remy had to resist the urge to eye him as he got dressed. "Hell, I'm down for some food."

Remy gathered her things together and headed downstairs. Tina and Vicki were already in the kitchen, and she could hear snippets of their conversation.

"...Steve spilled punch all over her white shirt..."

"I heard it was a big fight."

"What are we talking about?" Remy leaned against the bench, noting

how the pair had suddenly gone quiet upon her arrival. “Did Steve and Nancy get into a fight? Doesn’t surprise me, really. I’m only shocked it took him this long to get bored of her.”

“It was nothing.” Tina’s tone was dismissive, her eyes focused on Billy over Remy’s shoulder.

“Yeah, doesn’t matter,” Vicki agreed, busying herself pouring a cup of orange juice.

“Well, alright then.” Remy felt a sting of irritation at how closed off they were being. It was unlike Tina and Vicki to keep gossip to themselves, especially if it concerned Steve and Nancy. Maybe this was just Tina’s way of expressing she was pissed off that Remy had slept with Billy.

“Are you heading off?” Tina asked, and Remy couldn’t tell if she sounded disappointed or relieved.

“Sure am.” Remy tossed her hair over her shoulder. “Billy and I are headed out for breakfast.”

She felt a vicious surge of satisfaction in the way Tina’s face crumpled. Well, if she and Vicki were going to gossip and keep secrets without keeping Remy in the loop, why should Remy care how she felt about Billy?

“Great party, Tina,” Billy said as he followed Remy out the door, “See you at school.”

The Pancake Parlour was one of the more popular breakfast joints in town, so that was where Billy and Remy wound out. She surveyed him over the top of her strawberry milkshake. He was the year above her, and instantly popular. Other than that, she knew very little about Billy Hargrove. She’d seen a red-headed younger girl skateboarding away from his car on the first day - she guessed he must have a sister.

“So, you and your family moved from...?” It was a prompt for him to finish the sentence. She was curious, and wanted to get to know more

about him. Particularly as it seemed that their romp at Tina's could turn into something more. Remy wasn't one for boyfriends - she preferred hook-ups, and not necessarily just with boys. It just happened that hooking in the boys was easier.

"California." Billy finished eating his waffles, putting his knife and fork down. "Moved here with my dad, step-mum and step-sister."

So that was the little redhead. Billy's tone turned sour toward the end of the sentence, indicating he probably didn't have much of a positive relationship with his step-family. Remy didn't push it. She was good at reading people, but she had to know them to really know if she could dig or not.

"How are you finding Hawkins so far?"

"Quieter than California." Billy reached across the table with his fork and plucked an uneaten banana piece off Remy's plate. "What about you? Have you lived here your whole life?"

"Unfortunately." Remy heaved a sigh, rolling her eyes. "My family's kinda big around here. My dad works at the police station. My uncle - Mum's brother - is the mayor..."

"Your uncle's the mayor?" Billy whistled, raising his eyebrows.

In truth, Uncle Larry had helped Remy out of a few difficult situations. He had personally spoken to the principal of Hawkins High after the locker room incident, convincing him that Remy shouldn't be expelled. Larry was Penelope's older brother - they shared the same fair hair and blue eyes. He was one of the few adults that didn't annoy the absolute shit out of Remy.

"Yeah," Remy shrugged it off, but it made her feel good that Billy was impressed by it. "He's actually cool, for a middle-aged man."

"Any siblings?" Billy asked.

"Nope." Remy shook her head. Apparently, her mum had difficulty in having another kid after her. There had been some complications during her birth and although Penelope and Kieran had wanted a second child, it had never ended up happening. Much as her parents

got on her nerves, she didn't think that was a story she wanted to disclose about her family.

"I should take you home," Billy said, getting to his feet and fishing out his wallet. When Remy reached for her purse, he shook his head. "Breakfast is on me. Consider it repaying you for last night."

Remy couldn't help but smirk as she remembered the night before. Billy had known exactly where to touch her, what to do to get her to moan. Just as she'd been with a fair few boys, she assumed that Billy had probably been with plenty of girls. However, she found herself realising she wouldn't mind if it became exclusive. Billy was, after all, the new king of Hawkins High now that Steve had gotten boring. Her popularity didn't need a boost, but who better for the king than the reigning queen?

3. bad guy

Warnings: sexual references

Think you're so criminal

Bruises, on both my knees for you

Don't say thank you or please

The Halloween party seemed to have caused a few changes within the structure of Hawkins High School. Apparently, Tina and Vicki had rethought their strategy of excluding Remy from gossip, because Tina gleefully declared over lunch that Steve Harrington and Nancy Wheeler had broken up after an argument at the party. It was bound to happen eventually – the relationship was just too picture-perfect to be real. Although Remy didn't know the finer details – and apparently, Tina didn't either – she wasn't overly shocked. There were likely far more scandalous things that had happened at the Halloween party.

Remy didn't really care much for news of the break-up. She had things going on in her own world – such as her and Billy. It had been confirmed that they were exclusive, which had very much pleased her. It hadn't taken long, and she was proud of herself for managing to snare him so well.

“Do you think you'll make a play for Steve?” Tina asked, sounding almost hopeful as she picked at her food. Remy knew precisely why – if she pursued Steve, it left Billy for Tina. She didn't know why her friend was being so transparent. It was a bit pathetic, if Remy was being honest.

“I don't think so.” Remy tossed back her light brown hair, lips curving into a smile. “Things are going well with Billy and I, actually. We're a couple now.”

“Oh.” Tina couldn't conceal her disappointment. “I thought...”

“You thought what?” Remy raised her eyebrows, her impatience with

Tina growing. "That once I was done with Billy, you could have my sloppy seconds? Christ, Tina, have some self-respect. There are other guys around, you know."

"I didn't know you and Billy were serious," Vicki added, her eyes flicking nervously between her friends, "I thought it was just sex."

"No, he's my boyfriend." Remy fixed her gaze on Tina, eyes narrowing. "So I'd appreciate it if you backed off the idea that you might get with him."

Tina pushed herself away from the table, leaving her tray but stalking out of the cafeteria. Remy leaned back, folding her arms over her chest. Tina had often been put out by Remy's behaviour with boys, but this was basically a temper tantrum. Vicki watched her go with a worried expression, before turning back to face Remy.

"Are you going to defend her?" Remy asked coolly. Tina had needed putting in her place, and she'd just gone ahead and done it. Vicki could object if she wanted – she wasn't much better than Tina. She basically didn't even have an opinion that didn't belong to Tina or Remy.

"She's just...you know what Tina's like when she's into a boy."

"It's hardly my fault that Billy likes me better than Tina." Remy shrugged her shoulders, pushing the matter to the back of her mind. Tina would come back begging for forgiveness, and Remy would nonchalantly give it. Tina could be emotional sometimes, but god did it drive Remy up the wall.

She noticed Steve across the cafeteria. He looked exhausted, as though the break-up with Nancy had impacted him physically. There was some strange ache in Remy's chest when she thought about Steve and Nancy. They had both been her friends, but she had pushed them out of the way to climb higher on the rungs of popularity.

What did it matter? Remy was the envy of every girl in the school. She had the hottest boyfriend, went to the best parties, and still managed to attain above average grades.

She didn't regret her choice – did she?

“Well, don't you two look cosy?” Remy sauntered over to where Jonathan Byers and Nancy Wheeler were talking by Jonathan's beat-up old car in the parking lot. The two of them looked astounded to see her, and neither of them pleased. Jonathan put his hands in his pockets and looked away, while Nancy's lips pressed into a thin line. Remy turned her attention on her former friend, saccharine smile plastered across her face.

“Heard you broke up with Steve. Harsh.”

“I don't think that's any of your business,” Nancy said, a terse frown crossing her face. Her body posture and defensive tone told Remy she wasn't wanted, said ‘go away’ even though Nancy didn't have the balls to be that blunt. But when had she ever been one to do anything other than what she wanted?

Remy shrugged. “Rumours are circulating, I thought I'd try and figure out the truth. What exactly did he do to piss you off? Was it too much alcohol?”

It was amusing to her, that Nancy was hanging around with Jonathan so soon after she'd broken up with Steve. Maybe she'd been wrong about Nancy. Maybe Nancy just pretended to be prim and proper so she could sneer at girls like Remy who were open about their sexuality. Maybe Nancy Wheeler was the biggest hypocrite of them all.

“Leave it, Remy,” Jonathan insisted, causing her to turn her attention on him. Did the biggest loner in senior year actually just speak to her? She arched her eyebrows, giving him a withering look that should have intimidated him. However instead, Jonathan stared right back.

“Don't tell me what to do, Byers. Nancy and I are having a conversation here.”

“I think the conversation is over.” Nancy hoisted her bag higher up her shoulder. Fancy her getting so high and mighty when she was

fresh off a break-up and already sneaking around with Jonathan. At least Remy had the dignity to admit what she was up to with boys. Nancy must feel ashamed.

Remy laughed. "When did you decide you were bored with Steve Harrington?"

"When did you become such a bitch?" Nancy sniped back, and her ferocity stunned Remy into silence. "Back in middle school, we were friends. Best friends. Then we started freshman year and...things changed. But when Barb went missing you never even gave a shit. You don't give a shit about anyone but yourself, do you?"

Jonathan looked between them with a shocked expression. Even he probably hadn't expected Nancy to retaliate with such vitriol. Remy certainly hadn't. Normally she had some kind of snarky comeback, a witty quip to put someone back in their place. But she didn't have a response for what Nancy had just said. She just stared at her former friend, at the anger in Nancy's eyes. Nancy didn't dislike her, Nancy *hated* her.

"Hey, Remy." Billy's car screeched to a halt a few feet away, making them all whip around and saving Remy from having to come up with a reply, "You coming or what?"

"It's been nice chatting." Remy blew them a kiss as she headed over to her boyfriend's car. She opened the door and swung herself into the passenger seat, mentally noting that Billy's step-sister wasn't in the back. The kid's name was Max Mayfield, and Billy maintained that she was a pain in the ass.

"What was that about?" Billy sounded a mix of curious and amused as they roared out of the parking lot.

"Nothing exciting," Remy insisted, turning her attention on her make-up. She plucked a mirror out of her bag and applied another layer of lip-gloss. The best thing she could do was forget the conversation. As much as she tried to hide it, Nancy's words had stung – and they had Remy thinking on them a lot more than she wanted to.

“What do you think of Steve and Nancy breaking up?” Remy puffed out a plume of smoke and drew the cigarette back. She was sitting on the hood of Billy’s car, admiring the view of Lovers’ Lake under the setting sun. Billy was sprawled beside her, but his eyes weren’t focused on the lake, but on Remy’s long legs and the short hem of her neon green skirt.

Lovers’ Lake was a popular spot for teenagers to come and hook up, and it was quiet right now. Remy didn’t exactly want to share the space with a group of others, so that was totally fine by her.

“Doesn’t really bother me.” Billy shrugged his shoulders. “Plenty of other girls he could date. Don’t know why he dated a prude like her in the first place.”

“Nancy’s not a prude,” Remy blurted out, before wondering why the hell she was defending her. Nancy had given her a verbal lashing. When Tina pulled that kind of bullshit, Remy was the first one to bitch about it.

“Oh, yeah, I forget you two used to be friends.” A sly smile spread across Billy’s lips and he nudged her playfully in the side. She wondered who he’d been talking to who’d told him that, but her money was on Tommy and Carol. Those two never knew how to keep their mouths shut.

Remy scoffed. “Like, in middle school.”

“Were you two arguing?” Billy rested his hand on Remy’s knee, taking a puff of his own cigarette.

Remy reflected on their heated conversation. It had certainly felt like an argument, particularly with the accusation that Remy only cared about herself. It had gotten underneath her skin, in a way she certainly didn’t care for. It irritated her that she’d let Nancy get to her. Yeah, maybe they had been friends once – but they certainly weren’t anymore.

“Something like that.”

“Who cares what she thinks?” Billy scoffed. Remy doubted that he

cared what anyone thought of him. He was wild and carefree, and maybe that was why she was so drawn to him. A kindred spirit.

“She just mentioned a former friend of ours that went missing.” Remy didn’t know why she was suddenly talking about Barb. She didn’t think Billy cared about Barb, who’d gone missing before he even moved to Hawkins. But she did. She cared because Nancy was right – she’d been so dismissive. Barb could be dead and Remy would never even know, because she’d been too absorbed in other things.

Billy’s hand slipped higher, under the hem of Remy’s skirt. He pressed his lips to her neck, and she smiled and let her head fall back. This was all that mattered. She couldn’t change the past, and why would she need to? She had exactly what she wanted.

But at what cost?

She pushed those thoughts away. They belonged to a part of her she didn’t acknowledge anymore. She was Remy Saunders, queen of Hawkins High School, who just happened to have snagged the hot new boy for herself. All the girls wanted to be her – except, it seemed, Nancy Wheeler.

Billy put his cigarette out. “You gonna blow me or what?”

Romantic.

She did though.

It was apparent that Remy’s parents didn’t approve of Billy, or the time she came home. The porch light was on when Remy arrived, and although Penelope had gone to bed – probably to read some sordid Mills and Boon novel – Kieran was waiting in the lounge room when she came inside. Remy tried to lock the door quietly behind her, flicking off the porch light, but her dad was on his feet in an instant.

“Where have you been, young lady?” Kieran demanded. She could smell smoke and knew he’d just put out a cigarette, despite Penelope’s dislike of them being inside the house.

“Out,” Remy said curtly. Why did it matter to him? He and her mum came and went at all hours. She wished he’d been working at the police station tonight so she didn’t have to put up with this bullshit.

“Excuse me, it’s almost 10 o’clock on a school night.” Kieran barred her passage to the hallway, folding his arms over his chest. “Your behaviour has been getting increasingly worse over the last few months, but if this happens again, you’re grounded.”

Remy rolled her eyes. “I was at Tina’s.”

“Is that so?” Kieran’s eyes narrowed. “Because I called Tina’s parents to check if you’d gone there for dinner and they said no.”

Fuck. Remy seethed, having been caught out in her lie. She raked her fingers through her hair. She really just wanted to have a shower and go to bed. Why was her dad making this so difficult?

“It was that boy again, wasn’t it?” Kieran sounded triumphant, as though he’d solved some kind of mystery. “The new kid in town. Well, I’ve looked up this boy you’re seeing.”

Of course he had. “Fuck, Dad. That’s practically stalking.”

“Language, Remy,” he admonished, “Your mother and I don’t approve of him. You’re coming home at all sorts of hours...”

“Yeah, well, isn’t that what you do?” Remy’s temper snapped, and she threw her bag on the ground in a fit of temper, glaring defiantly up at Kieran. “You just...you come and go whenever you like. Most of the time, I’m by myself. Now you’re suddenly home one night and decide that you give a shit?”

“He’s a bad influence...”

“You’re *never here* !” Remy’s hands balled into fists. “Why do you even care? Half the time you have no idea what I’m doing because neither of you are around. You’re gone in the morning before I get up and you’re home after I go to bed most nights.”

Kieran looked very tired. “Remy...”

The regret in his voice was somehow more painful than any of his reprimands. Remy felt tears prick in her eyes, but she wiped them away before they blurred her vision. She picked up her bag and stalked down the hallway into her bedroom. The lamp on her bedside table rattled as she slammed the door.

Remy flopped onto her bed and nestled back against the pillows, closing her eyes and exhaling her frustration. She didn't like feeling as though things were beyond her control. Control was how she functioned, and emotional breakdowns were definitely not something that made her appear in control.

She heard the floorboards creaking as Kieran moved down the hallway, and she lay still, hoping that he wasn't going to knock on her door. She really didn't want to talk to him. Fortunately, he kept walking, until she heard the door to her parents' bedroom softly click closed.

Remy swallowed the lump in her throat, fighting back the feeling of being overwhelmed. She hadn't meant to have such an outburst, but her mounting resentment at her parents' absence had reached its peak.

It struck Remy that her apparently envious lifestyle was a neatly manufactured lie. Things weren't perfect for her, no matter how much she might strive to make sure they appeared to be. She felt so alone – family that were never around, friends she couldn't really talk to. There was no one she could depend on, and that knowledge terrified her.

But whose fault is that?

4. teen idle

Warnings: drug use, physical abuse

The wasted years, the wasted youth

The pretty lies, the ugly truth

And the day has come where I have died

Only to find, I've come alive

Remy didn't really know what had gotten into her, but after Nancy's venom, she felt the need to check in on how Steve was doing. She'd probably given her ex-boyfriend a verbal lashing too. As the bell shrilled for lunch, Remy leaned against the locker beside Steve's as he slammed his shut. He frowned to see her there, but she merely offered him a quick smile.

"Thought we could have a chat."

"What could we possibly have to talk about?" His eyes were wary and the tense set of his shoulders indicated he wanted nothing to do with her. But then, since when had making people upset or uncomfortable really bothered Remy?

She shrugged. "Heard about you and Nancy. That sucks."

Nancy and Steve had been together for the better part of a year. In truth, Remy hadn't expected the relationship to last as long as it had. Nancy was such a goodie two shoes, and Steve was...well, Steve. Yet he'd been loyal to her, and maybe he'd even been in love with her. Maybe that was the saddest part of all.

"Oh, please." Steve sounded frustrated, brown eyes flashing with impatience. "What do you care?"

Remy frowned, taken aback. "Excuse me?"

"You don't care about me." Steve folded his arms over his chest, glaring at her. "You're hooking up with Hargrove. I know what he's

like, and I know what you're like. You don't want to see how I am."

Remy wrinkled her nose. "Then why would I ask?"

"I don't know." Steve threw his arms up, looking incredibly fed up. "Gossip, maybe. But don't pull the good Samaritan on me, Remy. You're a bully at the best of times."

It was the second person whose cutting words had really gotten to Remy. She'd never been sensitive, but she also wasn't used to people talking like shit to her. She sighed dramatically and tried to act like it didn't matter. She tossed her light brown hair over her shoulder, studying her nails.

"Whatever, Steve. In future, I won't bother."

"Please, don't," Steve insisted, before pushing away from the lockers and marching away from her. She could see two senior girls whispering together across the corridor. She shot them a withering look and headed for the canteen. God, it seemed that everyone was in a fine mood recently. She only hoped that Tina had gotten over her spat from the other day.

Heading into the cafeteria, she noticed that more than a few people were looking in her direction. Already she'd heard the gossip about her and Nancy, with some of the sophomores swearing that it had escalated into a catfight, complete with hair-pulling. She wondered when exactly she'd lost her control, her ability to hold court in Hawkins High. Squaring her shoulders, Remy headed for her usual table. Whatever the cause, she wouldn't let it bother her.

It was traditional for Remy to head over to her uncle Larry's for dinner once a month. Sometimes, when they had the time, her parents would accompany her. More often than not, they didn't. So Remy sat with her uncle and aunt and indulged in a glass of the finest wine as they treated her to a decadent dinner.

Larry and Winnie's house was huge, so there was also space for Remy to crash after dinner – she knew that her parents wouldn't approve of her driving home after a glass (or two) of wine. Besides, she liked the

way being at Larry's made her feel. She felt important, like someone actually cared about her.

"How's school?" Larry asked as he began piling more peas and gravy onto his plate.

Remy pulled a face. It was one of the stock standard questions, and one she hated answering. School was *school*. It just existed. She attended it (most of the time) and that was all there was to it. She still had absolutely no idea what she wanted to do when she finished, but she wasn't all that bothered about it.

"Boring."

"Whose heart are you breaking at the moment?" Larry winked knowingly as he shovelled more pork into his mouth. It was a typical subject of discussion – Larry was well aware of what Remy was like with boys. She felt that she could confide in her uncle, more so than she could in her own parents.

"Larry," Winnie admonished, taking a sip of her wine.

"I'm not breaking anyone's heart." Remy went a bit coy, which was very unlike her. "But I do have a boyfriend."

"Oh?" Larry raised his eyebrows, eyes gleaming. "Does this boyfriend have a name?"

"Billy Hargrove." Remy felt a little shy, like a schoolgirl with a crush. She was sure that as the town mayor, her uncle would know basically everyone. "He's new in town."

"Is he a junior as well?" Larry asked, setting his knife and fork down on the plate.

"Senior," Remy corrected, pleased that he wasn't admonishing her. It was such a refreshing difference from her own parents, who were barely around and just wanted to control her life choices when they were.

"Ah, an older man." Larry grinned.

“Barely,” Remy said, but she couldn’t help but smile in return as she finished her wine. She always took measured sips, trying to seem like she was hesitant about drinking too much. It wouldn’t do for Larry to get any impressions about his niece and alcohol, although even he’d surely heard stories. He was so much more laidback than her dad. He was almost cool, as much as a middle-aged guy could be, in any case.

“How’s your mum?” Larry inquired, the shift in the topic of conversation causing Remy to stare down at her dinner plate. Penelope was Larry’s little sister, and it made sense that he’d ask after her considering he didn’t get to spend a lot of time with her.

“She’s okay, I think. Don’t see her much.”

“Sometimes, I don’t know why your parents didn’t have more than one kid.” Larry shook his head slowly. “Doesn’t seem fair leaving you home all by yourself most of the time.”

She’d never thought about it like that. Remy hadn’t ever considered the idea of a sibling. She’d been on her own for long enough that it would feel cruel. Wouldn’t it be just something else for her to deal with? She didn’t know if she agreed with Larry there. It would only make things harder.

“I guess not,” Remy whispered, blinking away sudden tears as they sprang in her eyes.

“Larry, come on.” Winnie frowned, shaking her head, before turning her attention on Remy. She was nice, Larry’s wife. She was pretty good at predicting changes in mood, too. “Do you want some ice cream, honey?”

“Sure.” Remy cracked a smile. If there was one thing she loved more than alcohol, it was Winnie’s homemade chocolate fudge sauce on ice cream.

Remy stood by Billy’s car with her arms folded and a pair of heart-shaped pink sunglasses on as they waited for his stepsister, Max. The redhaired girl skated over, picking up her skateboard as Billy unlocked the car.

“That kid you were talking to, who is he?”

“No one,” Max answered defensively, slipping past Remy to climb into the back seat. In all honesty, Remy hadn’t been paying as close attention as Billy had – she didn’t know which kid her boyfriend was referring to, but there could be no denying that he didn’t sound thrilled.

“No one?” Billy repeated, his tone indicating his disbelief.

“A kid from my class.” Max’s tone was dismissive, but there was something off about the dynamic between them. She was answering Billy’s questions rapidly, as if worried that he might get mad about something. Billy got into the driver’s seat and lit up a cigarette. There was a lot of tension all of a sudden, and Remy felt very uncomfortable. She glanced back at Max, who was determinedly not looking at Billy.

“Why was he talking to you?” Billy asked. Although Remy wanted to interject, she had the distinct feeling that her input wouldn’t be appreciated. To distract herself, she fished out her lip-gloss and began reapplying, although her lips were already so shiny she was sure Max could see her own reflection in them.

“It’s just about a stupid class assignment,” Max mumbled.

“Then why are you so upset?” Billy demanded, blowing out a plume of smoke and glancing into the back seat at her.

“I’m not,” Max insisted, her voice cracking. Remy’s fingers shook as she put her lip-gloss back in her bag, exchanging the tube for a cigarette and lighter instead. She lit up and took a deep inhale.

“He causing you trouble?” Billy pressed.

“Why do you care?”

“Because, Max.” His voice was firm. “You’re a piece of shit, but we’re family now whether we like it or not, meaning I’m stuck looking out for you.”

The way Billy talked to Max pissed Remy off. She couldn’t say

anything about it, because they'd been family far longer than she'd been Billy's girlfriend. Yet she could tell that Max was upset about this, and the fact that Billy talked down to his stepsister made Remy want to stick up for the kid. But where would that land her? Realising her options were shit, she remained silent.

"What would I ever do without you?" Max said sarcastically, but Billy's temper snapped and he reached around to catch her wrist, hard. Remy jumped, almost knocking her own sunglasses from where they were perched on the bridge of her nose.

"Hey!" Billy barked. "This is serious shit, okay? I'm older than you, and something you learn is that there are a certain type of people in this world that you stay away from, and that kid, Max? That kid is one of them."

Max tried to pull away, but Billy had a firm grip on her wrist.

"Billy," Remy murmured. He either didn't hear her, or ignored her, angry blue eyes focused on Max. She was starting to realise now that her boyfriend wasn't all he seemed – that there was something angry and violent within him, and it was something that freaked Remy out.

"You stay away from him, you hear me? Stay away."

Billy released Max and started up the engine. When Remy turned around, Max was crying. She didn't know what to do, or how to handle the situation. This was something way bigger than her, and she was so out of her depth she felt like she might be drowning. If she stuck up for Max, what was to stop Billy turning on her? If she said nothing, she would feel like shit because of it.

She already felt like shit about a lot of things. She stayed silent.

Billy and Remy spent their usual time at Lovers' Lake, and he'd seemingly been in a good mood despite the incident with Max earlier. Remy, however, couldn't shake what had happened so easily. She'd witnessed an ugly side to Billy, and she knew she didn't want to see it again. Although she knew she could have ignored it like he was doing, when Billy cruised up to park in front of her house, she knew

she'd done enough being quiet.

"Can I ask you something?" Remy's voice was tentative, and she fiddled with her tube of lip-gloss to avoid looking at him.

"Sure."

Her eyes flicked up to meet his. "Why are you so mean to Max?"

"What do you care?" His expression changed, countenance darkening as he processed what exactly Remy had asked him. She knew it was a stupid idea the moment he said that, and wished she could unsay it. Unfortunately, it didn't quite work like that, and so she was left trying to find a reason.

"I...I just..."

"Just what, thought you'd stick your nose in my business like you do with everyone else?" Billy demanded, and the furious gleam in his eyes admittedly scared Remy. She stuffed the lip-gloss back into her handbag, fingers tightening around the straps.

"I'm not sticking my nose in your business," she protested.

"Then what the hell does it matter how I treat Max?" Billy's voice was getting louder. It sounded like when he'd had a go at Max, and that was the last thing Remy needed or wanted. She heaved a sigh and tried to act nonchalant, even though her heart was hammering in her chest.

"Whatever." Remy opened the car door and slipped out, hoisting her bag over her shoulder. Billy rounded the car and grabbed her by the arms, fingers digging in. She tensed, the wildness in his eyes frightening her. She didn't want to see what he was like when he was really angry, she decided.

"Mind your own goddamn business, you hear?" he hissed.

"Stop it, Billy." Remy attempted to tug free, but Billy's grip on her tightened. He didn't repeat himself. He didn't say anything at all. There was something terrifying about the whole situation and for one absurd moment, Remy was scared for her life. There was a ridiculous

second where she wondered if Billy would kill her right here on her front lawn. He looked like he wanted to.

“If I scream, my dad will come out, and he’s a cop.” The words came out choked but defiant.

Billy released her, causing Remy to take a stumbling step backwards. He stormed back to the car and flung open the driver’s side door, slamming it behind him. The engine started and he revved off down the street.

The moment she heard him screech around the corner, Remy pressed her hands over her face and choked out a sob. She was still shaking violently, the incident still fresh in her mind. Retrieving her key from her handbag, she composed herself and stopped sniffing as she unlocked the front door.

As she stepped inside and clicked the door shut behind her, Remy wiped her eyes, her knees still trembling. A lamp turned on, and she prepared herself for a scolding – but it was Penelope, looking at her daughter with concern.

“Remy? What happened?”

“Leave me alone, Mum. I don’t want to talk about it.” Remy brushed past her, headed for her room. Her mum hovered, and there was that worry still in her eyes that made Remy even more upset.

“Was it something to do with Billy?”

“I said I didn’t want to talk about it!” Remy stalked down the hallway into her room, closing the door and standing by it until she heard her mum head down to her own room. Once the door shut softly, Remy tossed her handbag on the ground and immediately stripped down her underwear, tugging on her pyjamas.

Heading over to the mirror on her dressing table, Remy examined her reflection – except the girl there didn’t look anything like confident queen bee Remy Saunders. Her mascara had run from when she’d cried, and the tip of her nose was shiny and red. Remy gave her reflection a weak smile. She was going to have to work on that smile.

She was going to have to make it look real.

Two nights later, Remy and Billy went out drinking with Tommy and Carol and a bunch of their other friends. They hadn't spoken about the incident, and Remy wondered if Billy had completely put it away in his mind. For her it was harder – she had bruises on her upper arms in the shape of his fingers. A jacket was an easy fix, but it didn't mean she wasn't troubled.

For whatever reason, the drinking took place in the woods – Remy had heard some of the middle school nerds refer to it as 'Mirkwood', whatever that was. The location made her certain they were planning on getting up to some illegal activity, and when Tommy retrieved a small bag of powder from his pocket with a knowing grin, her suspicions were confirmed. Already five drinks deep, Remy shook her head when it was her turn to sniff the stuff off the hood of Tommy's car.

"No, I'm good."

"Seriously?" Tommy laughed, exchanging a look with Billy. "Come on, Remy. You're always the first to dive in to this sort of shit."

"I'm happy with this." Remy raised her beer in salute. She'd been practising her fake smile over the past few days and it came into full effect now.

"Just a little bit," Carol insisted, taking the beer from Remy's hand and urging her toward the car.

She knew how it would look if she continually refused. She'd bickered with Steve and Nancy, she'd had a fight with Billy. With so many of her relationships crumbling around her right now, Remy knew the last thing she needed was to jeopardise her popularity and get teased mercilessly for being the only one who didn't do cocaine.

Remy hadn't done cocaine before, but she'd done other drugs. What did it matter if she'd had a bit to drink? She'd always managed to shake off her hangover and comedown eventually. The pressure was on, and she wasn't one to look like a loser. In fact, she was usually

the person showing them all how it was done.

Grinning, Remy headed for the car and leaned over the hood to snort a line. She turned to look at Tommy, coolly raising her eyebrows. He hooted and clapped his hands, and Remy feigned a bow before accepting her beer back from Carol. Billy's eyes were on her too, and she felt desperate for his approval most of all. He smirked and pressed a kiss to her cheek, looping an arm around her waist as Tommy started setting up for the next person.

That was the last thing she remembered about that night.

5. valley of the dolls

Warnings: none

Got a hole inside of me

Living with identities

That do not belong to me

Remy woke dishevelled and aching in the middle of the forest, her limbs stiff and sore. Jolting upright, her cold fingers made quick work of plucking dry leaves from her hair. A morning mist had settled over the woods, but that wasn't the only reason that chills ran up her spine. Why was she in the forest? Why couldn't she remember what had happened the night before?

Remy rubbed her temples in an attempt to ease her pounding headache, restraining the urge to vomit. She had been out with Billy, they'd met up with some friends...she couldn't recall anything after that. There had probably been some drugs and alcohol involved, but why was she out in the forest alone? She felt vulnerable and betrayed. How could they have left her out here alone? There were probably bears in the forest, for fuck's sake.

Remy examined herself and huffed at the realisation she was an absolute mess. Her dress had small tears in places, her bare arms and legs were spattered with dirt. She didn't even want to know what her hair and make-up looked like right now. How could Billy and the others have been so selfish as to leave her alone? Anger swelled within her and she made a mental note to confront her boyfriend about it later. She deserved an explanation.

For now though, she had more pressing concerns – finding her way home. Prying off her high heels, Remy cast around and began to traipse through the forest. She didn't know what direction she should be headed in, but she fought back a wave of frustration. She was bound to come across a road sooner or later, and she could find her way back home from there. Her headache throbbed more insistently, most likely due to her growing stress, and she felt tears prick at her

eyes.

The sound of twigs snapping caused her to whirl around, heart hammering in her chest. There was definitely something in the woods. Even if it wasn't a bear, she knew it must be some kind of animal. Her anxiety was through the roof and she clutched her heels more tightly in her shaking fingers. Was this some kind of joke? Maybe Billy and his friends were trying to freak her out.

"Hello?" she called, her voice coming out hoarse and frightened.

Something emerged from the bushes. At first, she thought it was a large dog – but it quickly became clear that this *thing* was not a dog of any kind. The creature was like nothing Remy had ever seen, and when it snarled, its head unfurled like some kind of savage flower, complete with sharp teeth. Her eyes widened and she screamed as it bounded toward her.

Despite her utter terror, Remy acted on instinct. Swinging her heels around in a flurry of movement, she struck the creature hard. It yelped and stumbled back, caught off-guard. Disorientated, the creature bounded off, leaving her breathing hard, knees shaking like jelly.

Was she still high? What the fuck was going on?

Unable to suppress her nausea any longer, Remy leaned over and vomited into the nearest bush, resting her hand against a tree for support. This was beyond a prank. Her mind was struggling to process what she'd just seen, but it hadn't looked like an animal she even vaguely recognised. It had to be some trick. She must have just done something heavy and it still wasn't out of her system.

Nonetheless, Remy couldn't leave the woods fast enough. Despite the sticks and rocks that stabbed at the heels of her bare feet, she was more focused on reaching a road. Once there, she could navigate her way back to some form of civilisation. Her lips were chapped and although she fumbled around in her purse, she couldn't find her lip gloss. She couldn't stop thinking about how much she needed a bottle of water, if only to ease the pounding in her head and raw feeling in her throat from when she'd thrown up.

The road was no more forgiving on her feet, and she eventually found herself limping. A few cars honked at her as she passed, but she ignored them. She didn't feel comfortable accepting a ride from a stranger. Remy rubbed her arms even though it wasn't cold anymore.

She ended up at a gas station, thankful that she still had enough coins in her purse to use the pay phone. Leaning heavily against the scratched glass, Remy inserted the coins with fumbling fingers. For a moment, her mind went blank as she thought about who she could call. An idea came to her, and her fingers worked at the phone. As she heard the phone start ringing, she could only hope that she'd made the right decision. The phone was picked up on the other side, and she steeled herself.

"Hi, it's Remy." She squeezed her eyes shut, licking her lips nervously. "I need your help."

By the time the BMW crunched across the gravel into the gas station, Remy had purchased a small water bottle and a pack of ibuprofen. It hadn't really gone down too well on an empty stomach, but it was beginning to ease the nausea in her stomach and the throbbing headache. Looking up, Remy grabbed her heels and pushed herself to her feet. The driver of the BMW leaned out the window.

"This had better be good, Saunders."

Steve Harrington did not look impressed. When she had first called him, Remy had seriously debated whether he would come at all. What other options had she had? She didn't really want to speak to Billy and his friends. Her parents would throw a fit. Nancy still hated her. Steve didn't much like her either, but she recalled his number from freshman year, and knew he had his own car.

"Thanks for the ride." Remy slipped into the passenger seat, dumping her heels on the ground and slumping back in the seat.

Steve didn't respond. By the tense set of his jaw and the stony look in his eyes, he wasn't impressed. She wondered why he'd even agreed to come and pick her up at all if he was just going to be pissed off at her the whole time. Remy leaned against the window and contented

herself looking at the scenery outside.

Steve turned the steering wheel, veering the car off the road onto the gravel. She frowned and glanced at him as he twisted the keys in the ignition, turning off the car's engine. He gripped the steering wheel so tightly that his knuckles went white, before he threw her an irritated look.

"Seriously, Remy? You call me up after some bender to pick you up from a gas station outside of town. Because what, you couldn't be bothered to call your boyfriend or something?"

"Steve, I..." Remy didn't know how to explain. She suddenly felt small and alone and vulnerable. "I don't remember what happened last night."

"What?" Steve frowned, but the anger in his eyes was lessening.

"I can't remember!" Remy exclaimed, slapping her hands down on the dashboard in frustration. Tears sprang to her eyes, and she had to choke back a sob. "I know I was with Billy and some friends, but other than that...I just woke up and I was alone and..."

"Whoa." Steve reached out tentatively, before placing a hand lightly on her shoulder. The sudden movement startled her and she jerked away. There was concern in his brown eyes now. "It's alright. I mean...shit happens. They shouldn't have abandoned you."

"I want to know why." There was a steely edge to Remy's voice now. She reached up and angrily wiped away her tears. "I want to know why they left me there. There has to be some reason, if only I could remember..."

"Don't push yourself." Steve became aware of his hand on her shoulder and he cleared his throat and removed it, placing both hands back on the steering wheel. "Look, you haven't anything yet, have you?"

Remy shook her head vigorously. Her stomach rumbled at the thought of food. Steve's watch said it was almost 12:30pm. She'd not only skipped breakfast, but it was almost time for lunch.

“How about we pick up some food in town and I’ll drop you home?”

The offer was surprising, as was his tenderness. Steve was being so... nice. She hadn’t expected it from him. He could just have dumped her at home and it wouldn’t really have mattered. But his kindness made her feel warm and wanted. Remy managed a small smile.

“That sounds great.”

The taps squeaked as Remy turned them off, taking a deep breath and leaning against the cool tiles of the shower wall. Her parents were at work – of course – so she’d insisted that Steve stay for lunch. Dumping their takeout on the kitchen bench, she’d told him to help himself to the fridge and then went to take a ten-minute hot shower to wash the night before off.

Only ten minutes had turned into twenty. Remy’s mind continued to rethink what she did remember, particularly the disturbing creature she’d managed to fend off with her high heels. It would have made for a funny story, if it hadn’t been so fucking terrifying and if she actually knew what the creature was.

Stepping out of the shower, Remy wrapped a towel around herself and wiped down the foggy bathroom mirror. The girl who stared back at her looked exhausted and pale. There were dark circles under her eyes. The bruises she’d had from Billy hadn’t faded. If anything, washing off the make-up she’d used to cover them made them look more prominent. Shoulders slumping, Remy pulled on her t-shirt and sweatpants. Right now, she couldn’t care less what she looked like, even if she had Steve Harrington in her house.

Wringing out her wet hair, Remy padded into the dining room. Steve was at the table munching on his burger, but he immediately put it down when he noticed her walk in, a guilty expression on his face.

“Sorry. I was gonna wait, except I was really hungry and...”

“Steve, it’s fine,” she insisted, picking up her own burger and removing the pickles from it, “You picked me up and brought me home. You’re perfectly entitled to eat a burger if you feel so

inclined.”

Remy pulled out the chair next to him and started to eat. She didn't really have much of an appetite, but her stomach growling disagreed with that, and her headache probably wasn't going to improve if she didn't eat. For a few minutes, there was only the sound of chewing as both of them demolished their burgers and the family pack of chips they'd bought to share.

“What are these?” Steve noticed the bruises, pointing at them before Remy could draw her arms away. “Remy...”

“It's...”

Steve's sigh drowned out whatever she'd been about to say.

“Please don't say it's nothing. It's something. A bad something.”

“It was Billy, okay?” Remy's tone was sharp. There was no point in denying it when she had the feeling Steve would continue to be annoyingly persistent. “He just got angry and...lost control.”

Steve shook his head vehemently. “It's not an excuse.”

“I'm not excusing his behaviour,” Remy protested.

“It sort of sounds like you are.”

Tears pricked at Remy's eyes. She sniffed, raising her hand to wipe them away. Why was she crying so damn much today? It was getting ridiculous. Steve was right though – she shouldn't be excusing it. Billy had behaved in a terrifying way toward her, and now it turned out he'd abandoned her in the middle of the woods, with enough drugs and alcohol in her system that she couldn't even remember the night before.

“I don't mean to,” she whispered.

Steve's expression softened. “So you don't remember what happened? At all?”

How was she supposed to tell him what she had seen? Remy wanted

to be honest with Steve, but he'd think she was making shit up or that she was still high. Hell, she wanted to disbelieve what she'd seen. No one was going to believe that some monster was running through the woods and had tried to attack her. She'd been alone, she had no one to back her story up. It was best to just forget about it.

"No, nothing," she murmured, twisting the lid off her Coca Cola and taking a deep gulp. It probably wasn't good for her headache, but she felt that she needed the caffeine. "I know this probably all seems stupid to you. Fuck, even calling you was probably stupid..."

"Look, you needed help." Steve shrugged his shoulders, throwing up his arms in that dramatic way of his. "I could have ignored you. I could have left you there. But it would have been a shit thing to do, and I guess I thought...what if it was me, and I needed help?"

Remy couldn't help but crack a smile. "Well, thank you. I appreciate it."

"Did you want me to go?" Steve asked.

No, stay. That was the honest answer, but she also couldn't bring herself to say it. There was something nice about Steve's company. She was here with him, no make-up, dressed in sweatpants. She looked like a complete mess and for some reason, she didn't even care that she did. She thought it would be really nice if they were friends, but the world didn't just magically pan out that way.

"Probably a good idea." Remy raked her fingers through her wet hair. "I could use a nap."

They'd go back to school and act the same way toward each other that they had previously. It would be like none of this had ever happened. Yet as she watched Steve collecting the rubbish from their burger meal and putting it in the bin, Remy wondered if that was really what she wanted after all.

6. lovely

Isn't it lovely, all alone?

Heart made of glass, my mind of stone

Tear me to pieces, skin to bone

Remy caught the bus to school on Monday. It was the first time in almost a year since she'd last done that. She needed time to herself, time to contemplate what she wanted to say to Billy once she arrived. When the bus pulled up at Hawkins High, Remy could already see him in the parking lot, laughing with their friends. Were they really Remy's friends, after what had happened? Clutching her bag tight to her chest, Remy stepped down from the bus and ignored how her knees were shaking as she marched over to the group.

"Nice seeing you again, Remy." Tina was laughing. Tina, who shut the fuck up when Remy told her to.

"You look pissed," Billy remarked, raising his eyebrows as his eyes raked over her, "Still feeling like shit after the weekend?"

Remy fought back the overwhelming urge to hit him across the face. He was her boyfriend. These were her friends. They were the people she was supposed to be able to trust, and they'd just abandoned her. She couldn't even begin to explain how betrayed she felt. The only one who'd helped her out was Steve, and she owed him a lot for that. Steve wasn't even her friend...or maybe he was one of the few real friends she had.

"When I woke up, I was alone." Remy took a deep breath. She was normally made of marble, untouchable, but the cracks were beginning to show. Billy's smile was as cocky as ever but it was slipping, and there was dread in his eyes. Perhaps she wasn't the only person on the edge, about to lose their sanity.

"What do you remember?" He grabbed her by the shoulders, hard enough to make her wince.

“Nothing!” Remy wrenched away from him, temper flaring, frustrated tears welling in her eyes. She wasn’t this girl. She was cool, calm and collected. She had been the envy of every teenage girl in Hawkins, and now what was she? Who was she? “I don’t remember anything! So that’s why I want the truth, Billy. What the fuck happened that night?”

“You were high.” He scoffed, but there was something like relief in his eyes at her admission. It sent a chill down Remy’s spine. What was it that he wanted her to forget? “You were acting like a fucking psycho.”

She frowned. “What are you talking about?”

Billy tilted his head to show angry red scratches on his cheek and neck. Her stomach lurched at the sight of them. It looked like some kind of animal had attacked him, but she knew that wasn’t the case.

“You scratched me. I was trying to get you to come home, but you wanted me to leave you alone. So don’t blame me for something you brought upon yourself.”

His callous words, the barely subdued laughter of their friends, made something inside Remy snap. She curled her hand into a fist and punched him in the face. Billy reeled back and there was an ugly gleam in his eyes as he regained his balance, examining the blood on his hand where he’d wiped his nose with it. Remy stood her ground, jaw clenched, daring him to hit her back. She’d been afraid of him before, but she wasn’t now.

“We’re done,” she spat. There was so much more she wanted to say to him, yet now wasn’t the time or place. She didn’t truly believe she’d scratched him for no reason. Whatever had happened when she’d been high, she had never done something like that to a friend or a boy.

How could you leave me there? What made me attack you?

“Stupid bitch,” he seethed, spinning on his heel and stalking off toward the school as the bell shrilled throughout the parking lot.

“That was shitty, Remy,” Vicki stated. Even Vicki, who had normally tried to diffuse tension between Remy and Tina, was clearly Team Billy on this. She stood and watched as the people who’d once looked at her in adoration turned away, wary and whispering behind their hands as they followed Billy.

Remy headed into the school at a more gradual pace, heading straight for the girls’ bathrooms. She slammed a cubicle door shut and locked it with as much force as she could muster, as if shoving the bolt across meant she could punch Billy again. Remy dropped her bag on the floor and sank down onto the tiles. She tried to keep it together, but her feelings of dread and devastation meant a flow of tears which she could only wipe away with growing frustration.

What was happening to her? She hadn’t told anyone what she’d seen the morning after, although that was just as disturbing as her not remembering the night before. It had just been an all-round shitty experience, one that Remy felt she’d barely scratched the surface of. She would find out what that creature was, and she’d find out what had happened on that awful night.

As if her messy break-up with Billy wasn’t bad enough, her parents had been furious that she hadn’t come home and she was grounded. Penelope was tactfully avoiding addressing the subject, but Kieran was clearly mad at his daughter. He stabbed at his steak irritably in the first family dinner they’d had in months – not that Remy was game enough to mention that particular fact.

“Aren’t you eating?” Penelope asked, watching as her daughter pushed her peas around her plate.

In truth, Remy had absolutely no appetite. Her stomach was tightly coiled with stress. How was she meant to explain to her parents how her life was falling apart, without them seeing it as teenage melodrama? She’d broken up with her boyfriend, her friends weren’t talking to her. The only people who seemed to care were ones that Remy never would have picked for her allies.

“Your mother cooked a wonderful meal.” Kieran examined her with a hard look as Remy refused to break her sullen silence. “You should

eat.”

“I’m not hungry,” Remy murmured, knowing that a lack of an answer would only annoy her dad further. Her parents exchanged looks, and she could see Kieran roll his eyes before he looked back at her.

“Is this some form of protest because you’re grounded?” His tone was not encouraging or patient.

“No.” Remy shook her head. Tears pricked in her eyes as she looked up from her barely touched meal. It was time to start being honest with her parents. “Look, I’m sorry that I didn’t come home the other night, but...”

Kieran held up a hand. “I don’t need to hear excuses. I know you weren’t at Tina’s, or Vicki’s.”

“I don’t remember what happened.”

The words caused an uneasy silence to fall over the dinner table. Whatever her parents had expected to hear, it clearly wasn’t that. Remy was uncertain whether she wanted to continue, but she’d already started now. It was time for the truth, even if she didn’t know what the full truth was herself.

“What do you mean by that, honey?” Penelope tilted her head to the side, in that way she always did when she was confused.

“Exactly that.” Remy set her knife and fork down with a loud clatter of silver against china. “I woke up the next morning with no idea about what had happened the night before. So, your bet is as good as mine.”

Penelope started to clean up, but Kieran’s attention was focused on his daughter. It was a strange feeling, mostly because her dad never really paid her much attention unless she was in trouble for something.

“Did something happen to you?” Kieran asked, his voice uncharacteristically gentle and his eyes troubled.

Yes , Remy wanted to say, *I scratched Billy for some reason, but no one*

will actually tell me why. I'm scared and I'm lost.

"I was attacked by something." Remy focused on her plate, unable to meet her parents' eyes. "The next morning. There was some kind of creature, I don't know what it was..."

Kieran made a disbelieving noise. "So, you were high."

"No, it's not like that," Remy protested, but she had the feeling that her dad was done listening. He thought she was making up excuses. How could she blame him? She'd been doing it for years. The one time she was actually being honest, and now he wasn't buying into it. Maybe it made sense – how the hell was she meant to explain the creature that had attacked her?

Instead of further attempting to explain herself, Remy lapsed back into the same sullen silence she'd settled into when they'd first began the meal. If her parents didn't want to listen, then there was nothing to talk about.

Kieran and Penelope were at work the day the phone shrilled through the house. Remy ignored it for the first three rings, before realising the caller was persistent and wasn't going to give up anytime soon. Grabbing the phone off the hook and pressing it to her ear, she tried her best not to sound frustrated.

"Saunders residence, this is Remy."

"Hey, Remy." A pause. "It's Steve."

They hadn't really spoken since he'd picked her up from the woods. There had been quiet acknowledgements – a shared look across the cafeteria, a nod across the parking lot. Nothing too obvious. The last thing Remy needed was vicious rumours flying through Hawkins High about her and Steve. For once in her life, she didn't actually want to be the subject of gossip.

"Yeah, I figured." Remy leaned against the wall, twirling the cord around her finger. "What's up?"

"So, I figure you owe me a favour."

Remy tensed at those words. God, she hated those words. She hated the feeling of owing anyone anything, and now she was wary as to what Steve was going to ask for in exchange for him having done her a solid.

“What sort of favour?” Her tone was suspicious.

“It’s hard to explain.” His voice came out fast, like he was in a rush. “Can I pick you up?”

Remy rolled her eyes. She wasn’t going anywhere with that kind of weak explanation. She needed something a little more solid if she was going to sneak out. Not to mention she had actually been studying.

“Try again, Steve.”

“Okay, we’re hunting for this weird thing that Dustin was keeping as a pet. It’s escaped and apparently it’s dangerous.”

“You mean Dustin Henderson?” Remy frowned. She was only vaguely familiar with the kid, who was a friend of Nancy’s younger brother, Mike. It baffled her as to exactly how Steve had gotten caught up with Dustin. The two were an unlikely mix, and she didn’t think Steve was the babysitting type.

“Yeah.”

“I’m grounded, Steve.”

“Since when have you ever done what you’re told?” Steve sounded amused, before his tone became more serious. “I need your help. I wouldn’t be asking if I didn’t have to.”

“What do you mean weird thing?” Remy raked a hand through her hair, weighing up the pros and cons. “Was it some kind of lizard?”

“No, it’s...I have to show you.”

The words made Remy feel like she’d turned to ice. Her thoughts immediately went to the creature she’d seen in the forest. She had been beginning to think perhaps she’d been delusional, but Steve

being unable to explain what kind of thing Dustin meant made Remy certain that the two could be connected.

“Alright.” Remy licked her lips and took a deep breath. It was time to face at least one of her fears. “I’ll be ready in an hour.”

“We’re heading for the junkyard.” Another pause. “Bring some kind of weapon.”

He hung up without another word, leaving Remy feeling even more baffled. What kind of advice was ‘bring a weapon’? Although, she supposed if they really were hunting the sort of creature that attacked her in the woods, they’d need to be able to defend themselves.

“What the fuck,” Remy murmured to herself, setting the phone back on the hook.

She headed into her room and changed into some casual clothes, tying her hair back into a practical ponytail. It felt weird that she wasn’t even going to be wearing a scrap of make-up, but she didn’t think monster-hunting was the sort of business that required mascara. Even if some part of her, deep down, was superficially concerned with how she appeared to Steve Harrington.

God, she could *not* have a crush on him right now. It was the most inconvenient timing, she’d just broken up with Billy. Not to mention it was ridiculous to have a crush on a guy just because he’d bailed her out of a sticky situation. Yet the more Remy thought about it, the more she realised that Steve kind of respected her. Maybe he still thought she was a bitch – and who could blame him? – but he wouldn’t have summoned her on a monster hunt if he hated her guts.

Examining her reflection in the mirror, Remy conceded that she looked casual cute. She looked like she was trying too hard. A sort of ‘I just threw this on’ outfit. Letting out a frustrated sigh at the fact that she was behaving like an absolutely typical teenage girl, Remy slipped on some sneakers, grabbed her house keys and headed into the garage.

Kieran considered himself something of a handyman – although

Remy begged to differ on that account. He kept a selection of tools at the back of the garage for emergencies around the house. Remy's door hinges hadn't really been the same since Kieran insisted they needed a tune-up. Nonetheless, the tools were useful in her current situation. Picking up a pair of mallets set on top of a toolbox, a grin spread across Remy's face, unbidden.

Whatever the hell she was getting herself into, it was going to be fun.

7. bury a friend

Warnings: non graphic mention of sexual assault

For the debt I owe, gotta sell my soul

Cause I can't say no, no, I can't say no

Then my limbs all froze and my eyes won't close

And I can't say no, I can't say no

“Uh, so why are we at the junkyard?”

Remy shielded her eyes from the afternoon sun, scanning the rust-covered cars and handful of old swing sets. Dustin slipped out of the back seat of Steve’s car. The kid hadn’t given her any clues as to exactly what was going on, causing Remy to turn her attention on Steve, who had on a pair of banana-yellow gloves and was holding a bucket of raw meat. The most concerning was probably the baseball bat embedded with nails that he twirled in his free hand.

“Oh, yeah.” Steve examined the junkyard like they’d stumbled across the find of the century. “Yeah, this will do just fine. Good call, dude.”

Remy swivelled to fix Dustin with an accusing glare, pushing her sunglasses down her nose. “Explain.”

“So there’s this creature,” Dustin caved under her stare, rambling on immediately, “I kept it as a pet, but basically it’s from the Upside Down...”

Remy frowned. “The what?”

“Just let him tell the story,” Steve called as he scattered pieces of raw meat across the ground.

“...anyway, so it turned out it was actually a Demodog, and now I’ve kind of lost it.”

“Do you want to tell me what a Demodog is?” Remy asked coolly, but her heart was beating frantically. As Dustin explained, a story that would have made no sense to others made perfect sense to Remy. Forget the psychic girl and the alternate dimension or whatever. The Demodog...that was what she'd seen in the woods that day.

“I said medium-well!” Another kid's voice carried across the junkyard, and Remy turned to see Dustin's friend Lucas, and a red-haired girl she recognised as Billy's stepsister Max.

“Who's that?” Steve asked, and the longing on Dustin's face made him and Remy exchange a look. It was dead obvious that he had a crush on Max. Biting back a grin, Remy burrowed into her pocket and unwrapped a piece of gum, shovelling it in her mouth and chewing, savouring the rich grape flavour.

“So what exactly are we doing here?” she asked, falling into step beside Steve. Lucas and Dustin had gone to argue about something behind one of the cars, whilst Max was busy prying one of the doors off an old car. She wondered how exactly Steve had gotten caught up with Dustin. They seemed quite an unlikely duo.

“We're luring in this Demodog thing.”

Steve believed Dustin. Had he seen the creature, or was he going on blind faith? Either way, it made Remy think that if she admitted to having been attacked by this creature, maybe Steve would believe her. It was too early to call it, and she wasn't going to until she saw the Demodog for herself.

Remy arched her eyebrows. “I'm glad you trusted me enough to call me in on this.”

“Nah, you owe me a favour, Saunders.” Steve nudged her playfully in the side, and Remy had to stop herself from smiling. “Did you think I'd forget?”

“So you think I'm going to help you tear apart rusting vehicles to help you fortify a bus?”

Remy blew a bubble and popped it, but the queen bee bitch act was

gone. Around Steve, she wasn't sure who she became – someone she actually kind of liked. She wasn't unnecessarily mean, she wasn't trying to tear anyone down. Could it be that Steve Harrington was actually a good influence?

“Why, have you got something better to do?”

It was dark inside the bus, and quiet except for the wind whistling and Steve flicking his lighter on and off. It was a bit cold too, but Remy certainly wasn't going to be the first to comment on that. Instead she huddled down further, hugging herself tightly to conserve some warmth.

“So you really fought one of these things before?” Max asked, her arms folded over her chest as she looked over at Steve. “And you're like, totally 100 per cent sure it wasn't a bear?”

“Wait, what?” Remy looked incredulously at Steve, who was nodding slowly. She hadn't known that, and wondered when exactly he'd taken on one of these creatures.

“Shit, don't be an idiot,” Dustin chastised, his tone harsh, “Okay? It wasn't a bear. Why are you even here if you don't believe us? Just go home.”

“Sheesh, someone's cranky. Past your bedtime?” Max hauled herself up from her seat and climbed up the ladder onto the roof of the bus, where Lucas was. Personally, Remy couldn't say she blamed her, and she raised her eyebrows at Dustin's sudden attitude. Way to talk to a girl he had a crush on.

“That's good,” Steve said, and Remy couldn't believe he was praising Dustin, “Just show her you don't care.”

“I don't.” Dustin's face contorted into a frustrated frown when Steve winked in his direction. “Why are you winking, Steve? Stop.”

“Is this seriously your dating advice?” Remy asked. No wonder Dustin wasn't gaining Max's interest, considering the way he was behaving. Guys being assholes only made girls angry

“What would you suggest?” Steve’s words sounded like a challenge, and she realised that Dustin was looking at her curiously.

Remy sighed, easing herself out of her seat. She hadn’t thought this night would include giving dating advice to a thirteen-year-old, but she supposed it was time to make sure others learned from her mistakes. She leaned against the side of the bus, secretly enjoying her moment in the spotlight.

“You don’t wanna be a dick, alright? It’s not a turn-on.”

“Worked for Billy,” Steve muttered, causing Remy’s temper to flare. That name was not associated with good memories, and she didn’t want to hear it from Steve in that context. She rounded on him, blue eyes flashing with fury.

“Shut the fuck up.”

“Whoa.” Steve held up his hands defensively. “Easy.”

Remy flopped into a seat, arms folded over her chest. Dustin looked disappointed that he wasn’t going to be getting any more advice. Steve examined her with confusion. He was clearly wondering why she’d blown up so badly. Even she couldn’t explain it. Her break-up with Billy hadn’t been pretty, and despite the weirdness of the night, she had been enjoying herself until he’d been brought up. Steve went back to flicking the lighter on and off, while Remy blew another bubble. Dustin jumped at the sharp *snap* as she popped it.

“I’m sorry.” Steve sighed, dropping the lighter in his lap when it became apparent that Remy wasn’t going to talk to him again unless he apologised. “I shouldn’t have said that. Alright?”

“Apology accepted,” Remy responded quietly. Steve offered her a smile and after a moment, she couldn’t help but return it. He hadn’t meant to be an asshole, and she knew that. She just hoped that they could put what had happened with her and Billy behind them. It was something she’d rather forget.

“I’ve got eyes!” Lucas shouted from the roof, jolting both of them out of their comfort zone. “Ten o’clock!”

Everyone launched for the barred bus windows, Remy peering out into the darkness. She could hear a distinct growling, however she couldn't see anything. A creature moved into the light, and although it was too early to tell, she had the sudden impression that it was what had attacked her in the woods. Without thinking, she grabbed Steve's arm. He glanced at her, raising his eyebrows in surprise, and she let him go.

"Why isn't he taking the bait?" Dustin asked.

"I don't know." Steve drew away from the window, grabbing the spiked bat he'd had leaning against the side of the bus. Remy reached for her mallets, but he shook his head and she frowned.

"Steve?" Dustin looked shocked as he headed for the bus door. "What are you doing?"

"Just get ready."

The bus door squeaked as it opened, Steve stepping outside into the mist. Remy was pressed against the window again in a matter of moments, Max and Dustin either side of her. Her heart hammered against her ribcage, her stomach twisting tightly in anticipation. Remy curled her fingers around the bars, knowing she'd head outside without hesitation if Steve was in danger.

Who had she become? Who was this girl, who hung out with random kids and would throw herself headlong into danger after a boy she had a crush on? It was like the venom was draining out of her, and like Steve was responsible for that, at least partially.

"He's insane," Max breathed.

"He's awesome," Dustin countered.

Remy was inclined to agree with both remarks. Steve was brave, but he was stupid. As mist coiled through the darkness, Remy noticed movement in another part of the junkyard. She wasn't the only one.

"Steve, watch out!" Lucas yelled. "Three o'clock!"

The Demodogs growled, poised to attack. As Steve backed away, they

went at him. He rolled over the hood of a rusted old car to avoid them, hitting one with his spiked bat as it launched at him. Max and Dustin threw open the bus door, screaming for Steve to get inside. Remy felt as though she was glued to the window, unable to look away as she watched Steve sprint toward them with the Demodogs hot on his tail. They were definitely the sort of creature that had attacked her in the woods – except they were bigger now.

Steve jumped inside and the kids slammed the door closed. The Demodogs hammered against the side of the bus. Remy gritted her teeth and threw her full weight against the bus door to prevent them from getting inside. When she noticed Steve catching his breath across from her, she couldn't help but shake her head.

"This is *not* what I expected when you said I owed you a favour."

"What can I say?" Steve managed a grin. "I aim to impress."

Max's scream rang through the bus, causing Remy to glance at her. A Demodog was at the top of the ladder, and Max was directly below it. Shoving herself away from the bus door with a murmured curse, Remy grabbed Max by the arm, dragging her back and out of the way as Steve pushed past them. He waved his bat menacingly, but the creature withdrew before he'd even had the chance to hit it.

The sound of growling receded, and when Remy let go of Max's arm and peered out of the window, she could no longer see any of the Demodogs. The only sound was the whistling of the wind and the creaking of the old bus. Remy raked her fingers through her hair, realising that she was definitely no longer cold.

"What happened?" Dustin questioned as Steve opened the bus door and tentatively peered out across the junkyard. It was quiet once again, moonlight gleaming off the broken-down cars.

"Did Steve scare them off?" Lucas asked a moment later.

"No." Steve shook his head slowly, glancing over his shoulder at the rest of them. "No way. They're going somewhere."

Remy convinced Steve to drop her back home before he took the kids and went after the Demodogs. She'd had enough action for one night, even if it had been oddly enjoyable. She snuck into the house and placed the mallets back where she'd found them, but her parents weren't home yet. As Steve's car crunched back down the gravel driveway, Remy raided the pantry for a can of food.

It was a bit of a relief to realise that she wasn't crazy, and that the Demodogs weren't just a result of a faulty memory. As weird as they were, they were real. Remy would have laughed out loud, had she not known that the Demodogs were a sign of hectic things happening in Hawkins. Dustin's explanation made her think more deeply. Hawkins wasn't the sleepy town she'd always assumed it to be, she just hadn't been paying attention.

A memory came to her, sharp and sudden, when she was folding up her clothes and shoving them into her drawers. Her fingers trembled as they traced over the outfit she'd worn into the woods, the tears in her dress more prominent now that it had been through the machine. Something about those little rips made her mind drift back to that night.

Remy remembered her dress hiked up past her thighs. She remembered Billy on top of her, his lips against her neck and her shoulder. His hands had been hot, feeling like they burned as they traversed her skin, or maybe she'd just been cold as a corpse. She remembered a stinging slap across the face. She remembered the tears dripping down her cheeks and the sobs that wracked her frame as Billy had fixed his clothes up.

Remy had assumed, partially correctly, that she hadn't remembered the night before she'd woken up in the forest due to the amount of alcohol she'd consumed. Now she realised that it was also trauma. Dissociative amnesia was what it was called. She'd completely shut out what had happened to her the night before because she hadn't been able to deal with it...only now, she could feel the pieces of the puzzle coming together.

She knew why she'd scratched Billy's face and neck. She knew why he'd abandoned her in the woods. It was because of what he'd done to her, something he hadn't acknowledged and she hadn't

remembered – until now.

Stumbling into the bathroom, Remy jammed open the toilet lid, kneeled down on the tiles and vomited into the bowl. Her slender frame shook with sobs as her fingers curled into fists. Whatever she'd thought might have happened in the forest, whatever she'd thought Billy had done, the fractured memory was enough to assure her this was far worse.

“ Fuck !”

Remy slammed her fist against the side of the toilet bowl once, twice. Her skin split on her knuckles and she could feel the sting, smell the metallic tang of blood. None of that mattered. All Remy could think about was Billy on top of her. It had been weeks ago now, but she felt like she was suffocating.

She lay down and rested her cheek against the cool tiles. The chill against her skin was oddly comforting, and Remy closed her eyes and took a few deep breaths. She had to try and keep herself from letting the horrific memories consume her. Now that she knew what had happened, she couldn't ever see herself forgetting again.

What was she meant to do now? Remy didn't want Billy to get away with what he'd done to her, but she was lost as to where to turn. She didn't feel that she could tell anyone. She had a reputation, after all. Who could she even trust to believe her?

For now, thinking was too much. Her head throbbed and she closed her eyes, praying for sleep to claim her.